

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.

Not every man has made some woman wife,
Nor every woman chosen a career,
Yet to the seeing eye 'tis amply clear
Each acts on his "Philosophy of Life."

Some thirty comrades passed a many days
In sunlit valley—'twas a sheltered nook—
Learning from lips and many a weighty book
To set their rule of life in catching phrase.

"Nature is nought to Habit's tenfold chain."
"Speak gently, firmly, 'Johnnie, shut the door.'"
"Let infants ne'er the sugar-bowl explore."
"Wise aunts to screaming Tommy say 'Refrain.'"

A leading question asked they not at all,
Nor sought to learn a name before a thing,
But, with Associations in a string,
Sent memory's bucket to some fact recall.

Time by the bushel there they used to make,
And learnt "to do the thing they'd rather not,"
"Changed someone's thoughts" when anger made them hot,
Bore sundry burdens "for the children's sake."

There, to direct each altruistic stream,
They had to find the dominant desire,
Give such ideas as should the young soul fire
With wonder, reverence, and heroic dream.

So now when theoried life is practice grim,
"Relationships," not science here, but fact,
Some dear old phrase shall nerve each heart to act,
And "bent, not broken," shall be writ of him.

R. A. P.

BIRD NOTES.

"Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in Summer,
How they hid themselves in Winter."

WE spent about four months, May and June one year, July and August the next, in a pleasant little German Bad and the time passed quickly and pleasantly owing not a little to the bird-friends, old and new, we found there. There is a large and shady park where many of the trees are provided with nest-boxes, offering tempting building-sites; there is the little stream whose shallow bed and pebbly margin afford the most convenient and comfortable bathing-places; there are the low bushes reaching almost to the water on either side, such capital drying shelters; there is the large pond surrounded by a double row of old pollard willows whose knarled and knotted stumps studded with holes tempt intending builders; there are the fields, wide and open, with long grass for those who prefer to hide their tiny houses on the ground, and there are large barns with low eaves for others. The Starlings patronize the boxes, but there was a Wryneck in one—that strange brown bird, with its lizard-like markings of darker brown and its weird cry, loud and shrill, which carries a long way and is consequently rather difficult to trace to its owner. You find him, however, at last, sitting *along* a slender branch so much the same colour that you wonder if he is not some growth on the branch itself; but, as you approach from behind, the bird, without moving his body, turns his head round over his back, and you are still more amazed at his apparent shape till you know the cause. When we got a little more familiar with the bird, we found him running low in the grass with his head down, looking like a lizard, and once, suddenly stretching his neck, he raised his head so that the head seemed to pop up some distance away from the body. He is rather an uncanny

creature on the whole. Later in the year we found him running in the open fields and feeding on the ground with his young ones round him.

Our daily walks in June took us round the pond, and in the niches in the pollard willows we watched many a brood hatched and fed into fledglings. A pair of Chaffinches had built their nest in a cup formed by an excrescence on the bole about five feet from the ground, and we watched the mother here day by day, her little, bright, eager eye glittering out over the side of the nest but she never showed any sign of fear or fluttered off even when we stood to watch her. On another tree a brood of Nuthatches came forth, and swarmed up and down the trunk and cropped branches like mice, with their tiny *peep, peep, peep*, while their parents sought for and fed them with insects. In one bole there were three nests. A pair of Great Tits, with their nest in a hole about four inches from the ground, were day by day flying quickly to and fro with food for their babies. The father-bird, when he saw us, uttered his alarm note and, with his beak full, flew anxiously to a branch on another tree, trying to distract our attention from the nest, but the mother-bird continued to go to and fro in spite of us and at length he took courage to do the same. In the same bole, about six feet up, a Hedge-Sparrow was sitting and, round on the other side, a pair of Redstarts were also busy feeding. A few trees further on a pair of Blue Tits were performing the same office.

Redstarts are very common here, and come close up as one sits in the park. One sees a dainty little brown bird on the path, with a quivering tail, and as one approaches there is a flash of scarlet under the tail—she is gone, and you know you have seen the female Redstart. Her handsome lord, with his black throat and white crown, is less shy, and allows you to pass him on the path, and admire the fluttering glimpse of scarlet glow in his tail. A pair of them reared their young in a hole in the brickwork under the bridge. One day we had the great pleasure of making the acquaintance of the Black Redstart.

I stood on the bridge across the pebbly stream one evening about six o'clock and watched Lord Redstart take his bath. How he flashed his lovely tail! When the sun caught the glint of scarlet it looked almost like a flame on the water.

A Wren came too and with his little cocked-tail splashed the water over his tiny self and then, with a quick fly to a low bush, stood shaking his ruffled feathers into shape once more. A spot of rich black that seemed to move on the brown stones betrayed the Blackcap Warbler, who, sipping and throwing his head back in enjoyment of the pleasant draught, and then, taking a little splash, flew to the top of the nearest bush and burst into his thrilling song, turning his little body round with short, quick movements in the excitement of making such melody. A Nuthatch crept down a tree on one side, showing his pretty sober grey mantle and flushed waistcoat; and up and down the stream with dipping flight a Wagtail floated, pausing now and then on a big stone in the water to wag his tail in a most emphatic manner, but only for a minute, for he was off again, uttering his little cry all the time of flight. There was another species of Wagtail on the bank, going in little quick runs, moving its tail and strutting its head in apparent eagerness to get along faster. Of course there were Thrushes there and Blackbirds making a big splash, and a stately Bullfinch came and solemnly took his bath, showing his striking black, grey and white plumage, with cap of red, off to perfection. Goldfinches, too, came for a drink and a bath, and quickly flashed into the bushes again; and one listened to their ceaseless chatter and then was surprised at the burst of song that proceeded from one of their number. A harsh scream in a bush near by heralded a Greenfinch who presently made his appearance. His green complexion and the dark bar across his tail left no doubt of his identity. All these in an hour!

One day I saw a Starling's nest in a tree overhanging the stream, and, though food was in his beak, the Starling himself would not enter without many protests at my being there, and I was reproved by a German, who told me that "the poor bird cannot go to its nest while you stand so close!" Birds are tame in Germany, but their feelings are so respected in this law-abiding country that one is not surprised.

I should have said respected by the human folk, for a cruel persecution by feathered folk was carried on under our very window. The nest was in an evergreen shrub, and a patient mother Chaffinch sat on the eggs while the father chirped near

by. A Blackbird came several days in succession and deliberately drove the mother-bird off the nest and then mounted guard himself. The mother each time flew off with a piteous cry, while the father flew in trembling rage at the heartless black monster who just looked at him calmly. I drove the Blackbird away, and, flying up to the tree above with a loud and fiendish chuckle, he waited till I should be gone, only to begin his evil game again. The Chaffinch seemed to understand I was protecting her, and flew straight to the nest directly the Blackbird was dislodged. As soon as I turned away, back came the Blackbird and I had to return several times in the course of an hour to shake my fist at him. For two or three days this went on but finally the mother was left in peace.

Out in the fields, later on, the hay was being cut and one day we came across the Red-backed Shrike, standing on a haycock, gazing earnestly on the ground with his head on one side, watching for field mice perhaps. His attitude is unmistakable, and one is able to put him down at once as a bird of prey. In July we had many opportunities of getting quite close up to him, and noting what a sinister look the black streak over his eye gives him. His favourite post seemed to be on the edge of a field of corn, not yet cut, and, after standing quite motionless, down he would dive swiftly into the corn. Those who have had the privilege of seeing the beautifully-arranged British wild birds, with their nests and young, in the Natural History Museum (London) will remember his larder in the thorn-bush, where a mouse and several insects are spiked. He indeed deserves his name of Butcher-Bird.

Another day we came across flocks of Corn-Bunting, some of them swinging on the golden heads of grain in the corn-field, others singing excited little songs on the low trees. There were Yellow Hammers on the fruit trees that lined the path, chanting to each other their well-known song. There, too, we saw the Cirl Bunting and the Brambling and Larks, and birds we did not know.

We stopped one day at the entrance to the wood after crossing these fields, and away across one field, where hay was being carried, we heard a little, low, lark-like song. The strange part of it was that it seemed to be sung on the

ground, and there was a sweet, quaint "lulu" note at the end. We followed the song down the field, and soon came upon a little bird, something like a Lark in shape and colouring, crouching in a haycock. He was not shy, and we saw enough to enable us to identify the Woodlark. His song has been well called "one of the sweetest of country sounds." Another day, we again happened upon a bird like a Lark in shape and colour, but it had a crest, and was running in a sandy road, and these two facts enabled us to delight in the discovery of the Crested Lark.

We followed the stream once out into the open common, and there, dipping and floating and turning, were Swallows and Martins, the Swallows flashing blue with their elegant forked tails, and the Martins easily distinguished by the white spot at the tail base. Daintily picking its way over the stones was a Grey-headed Wagtail. Another day, in passing a ploughed field, we came upon at least a dozen White Wagtails busy in the furrows.

But space forbids more.

Is it not possible that a keen interest in the birds and their habits might serve as a counter-attraction to egg-collecting?

Surely the eggs are the really least interesting part of bird-life, and, anyway, how much more interesting to know whether a bird walks or hops, what it eats, how and of what it builds its nest, and where you may be almost sure to find it, what its note is, whether it has a song, and if so to know that song so well that you can distinguish the bird by its song alone.

One can get some of this knowledge out of books, but it helps one little in recognizing the bird at first. The best use of a book is for reference *when* the bird has been carefully watched, and something in colour or shape or habit has been noticed that *may* be a distinguishing feature. You may be disappointed and find that this feature is common to many birds, but there is no need to be discouraged. Go back, find the bird, watch him again, and you will soon be rewarded by being able to give him a name! The chief thing seems to be to notice *every* bird you see. The number of "sparrows" in the district will diminish considerably, and your circle of acquaintance will be an ever-widening one. Again, egg-collecting is confined to one or two months in the year, while bird-acquaintances may be made in every month. There are

birds with us all the year round, those who winter with us and nest, say in the Arctic regions, those who nest with us and go to warmer lands for the winter, those who nest in a north county and winter in a south. Then every county, every village almost, differs in its bird-life, and one learns gradually to know what inhabitants to expect on the moor-land, the marsh, the down, in the copse, on the lake, on the heights, so that there is probably everywhere some new acquaintance to be made, and one might, after years of patient watching, be in a position to record the appearance of a rare bird or to establish some fact as to the habits of such a bird as the Cuckoo for example! The more one learns about birds the more one is struck by the fact that they are not the casual creatures one is apt to think them at first.

I would not, in conclusion, even suggest that anything appears in the dear Red Magazine which we do not read, but may I, in this connection, call attention to the charming Bird Studies which Miss L. Armitt gives us, for in them we get that introduction to the birds themselves which only a real lover and student of birds can give, because the introduction is given at first hand from a close personal acquaintance.

E. K.

BROWNING.

V.

I. BROWNING AS A PAINTER OF NATURE.

THIS is a phase in which we do not often see Browning. He dealt, as a rule, with men only, not with their surroundings, but when he does touch upon Nature he generally regards it merely as a setting for the human picture. In "Up at a villa, Down in the city," an Italian noble bemoans his fate, in being compelled through poverty to live in the country, the beauties of which he does not appreciate, comparing them with the busy stir of the town, concluding:

"Oh, a day in the city square! There's no such pleasure in life."

Perhaps this must not be taken too literally as an exact interpretation of Browning's own views, yet, to a certain extent, it shows his appreciation of town and country. He preferred to study man in relation to his fellow men rather than man in his relation to Nature. He belongs to the reaction against the undue prominence given to Nature by Wordsworth, Turner, and Ruskin, so he always considers Nature as second to man, and very seldom gives it a prominent position; when he does so he is generally least successful. He is not, by any means, without any love of Nature, and very often his allusions to it in short illustrations and introductions are very beautiful:

"A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
In rival dance."—*Ring and Book VII.*, 1225.

In *Meeting at Night* there is a most beautiful and vivid picture of the sea at night:

"The grey sea and the long black land
And the yellow half-moon large and low,
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep."